

# **RESULTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS**

The information gathered to assess rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities within the Wisconsin DVR included: public hearing comments, WRC comments and minutes from WRC meetings, DVR Consumer Feedback Survey results, DVR staff feedback and comments from WRC members.

## **1. Description of the results of the comprehensive, statewide assessment with respect to:**

### **a. Rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities**

#### **Staff**

The WRC and DVR Consumer feedback indicated the following needs for staff and staff competencies:

- In order that DVR Counselors can adequately serve all eligible applicants, the WRC moved that administrators of the federal Ticket to Work program send out tickets over a 12 to 18 month period.
- DVR needs to increase its efforts in hiring persons with disabilities at the management level.
- Counselors spend time completing forms that are hardly cost effective. The financial needs test is such a form. The time spent completing this form is more expensive than the contributions made by consumers. The form is inequitable and often shows wealthy consumers as having more financial need than those with few financial resources. The DVR Policy Academy has proposed a new form and policy change.
- DVR must use more effective avenues of communicating policy changes to DVR Staff. Some policy changes have existed for a year but few counselors were aware of them.
- Staff need wages that are commensurate with their education and experience. If we mandate DVR counselors to have certification that requires a master's degree and two years of practical experience, then pay wages among the lowest in the mid-west, contradicts recruitment and retention efforts.
- Increase in-service training for VCR's who work with under-served populations or disability groups such as farmers. Training in working with deaf-blind consumers is needed too.

## **Services**

The Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council meeting minutes, and other consumer and stakeholder input, indicated the following needs in various areas of service delivery affecting DVR consumers:

- If a consumer calls DVR after receiving a Ticket to Work, the individual will be provided with the pros and cons of the ticket versus DVR. This information will be presented to the consumer from a prepared fact sheet.
- There is a lack of interpreters for minority individuals who do not speak English. This issue needs more attention.
- The WRC voiced concerns that the proposed fee schedule established by DVR was too small and may prevent some consumers from receiving needed services.
- WRC heard placement vendors request more flexibility from DVR when a consumer's circumstances and needs do not match the traditional placement service.
- Vendors from the SE part of the state had serious problems with low payment rates for services but stated the new rates help.
- In relation to public and private entities becoming accessible, DVR should operate in a manner that encourages ADA implementation and treats all public and private partners by the same standards.
- Relationship with employers – consumers indicate that more active and individualized job development is needed.
- DVR needs to cooperate with private agencies to develop a comprehensive driver assessment/education system for drivers with severe physical or motion limitations.
- Consumers with severe disabilities who want to “Make Work Pay” need additional attention by DVR staff. Greater focus is necessary to encourage and assist those involved in MWP programs.
- Wisconsin Job Centers are not TTY accessible. Some DVR offices are still inaccessible by TTY.
- Improved access to assistive technology & services. High cost items are not always available to consumers when needed.
- Insure general accessibility of Wisconsin Job Centers. Consumers complain that all sites are not accessible.
- Consumers need to be involved in the decision making process. Counselors need to listen to consumer input.
- Placement into jobs that have potential for promotion to higher level jobs that allow and promote career advancement.
- DVR should demonstrate it practices what it preaches by hiring, and promoting, persons with severe disabilities.
- Contract with agencies that can assist in providing services to consumers who are under-served.

## **Education**

The following recommendations were made by WRC members, individuals at public hearings and other consumers and stakeholders:

- Education of policy makers and elected officials regarding effectiveness of DVR services
- Education of community partners regarding effectiveness and direction of DVR services.
- Education of consumers regarding DVR services & outcomes.
- Education of private sector (employers) regarding ADA, DVR, employment of persons with disabilities.

### **b. Needs which focus particularly on the service needs of**

#### **i. Those with significant disabilities, including supported employment**

Review of all the above data sources indicated the following needs:

- Improved access to assistive technology services and devices.
- Supported employment growth is limited due to limited long term support dollars from the county. There are still counties which do not provide long term supported employment funding.
- Early intervention for students with severe disabilities in transition planning.
- Ensure that persons with most severe disabilities are served by the closing of categories for services of less significantly disabled is addressed under order of selection (4.12 c 2).
- Creative ideas to provide supported employment for persons with most severe disabilities that could occur with alternative funding (PASS Plan or private payment) or without funding. (for example, matching persons with industries that experiencing employment growth with employer paying costs of training).

#### **ii. Those with disabilities who are minorities**

DVR program data and discussions with consumers and staff contributed to the following identified needs:

- An analysis of DVR data elements reveals that some DVR staff are in need of cultural diversity training relative to working with minority populations in inner city areas.
- Some offices that serve areas with large minority population concentrations need to improve performance in the areas of their ability to maintain contact and achieve cooperation with minority consumers. These offices need additional staff training as well as recruitment and retention efforts.
- The success rate for white consumers is 54%. The success rate for minority consumers is 39%.
- Need to improve outreach and education with all the various minorities that are potential customers.

- Need to improve our ability to keep persons in the rehab process beyond the initial phases of the program.
- Services need to go to persons (e.g. mobile offices) to improve outreach.
- Effective linking with cultural or ethnic groups by persons who can represent DVR services and advantages.
- More flexibility of providing job related services and employment where people live versus having people going to DVR offices or Job Centers.
- Need for more effective outreach to African Americans, particularly in high poverty urban areas, is needed to improve both representativeness of numbers served and to achieve better outcomes.
- Need to improve outreach to Native Americans living on reservations. While DVR has assisted the Great Lakes Intertribal Council and the Oneida tribe to establish section 121 VR programs, ongoing coordination and support will be needed to achieve substantial outcomes.

### **iii. Those with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved**

In addition to the needs identification related to minorities, WRC members and DVR staff identified the following:

- Further develop access to DVR services for farmers who have disabilities. This is being accomplished with involvement from the Business Enterprise Services and Training (BEST) program.
- Farmers have been identified by the Client Assistance Program as an underserved group.
- Need to improve outreach and education for persons with disabilities who are living in rural areas, minorities and persons in general.
- Through the development of the BEST program, address the concerns of consumers who state there are insufficient opportunities to enter into small businesses. DVR has not been a good resource in promoting small businesses when this is a consumer's vocational goal.
- Appeals concerning farm plans are disproportionate to the number of appeals concerning other IPE goals.
- Deaf and hard of hearing consumers are often underserved because of the lack of available qualified interpreters.
- The use of tribal leadership on the Wisconsin Rehab Council to improve outreach & education of DVR with Native Americans.
- Mobile units that bring services, assistive devices to persons with disabilities, easier access to services.
- Some disability groups are traditionally underserved. This is often because of lack of training, communication skills and expertise by VR counselors. Many of these consumers are unaware of the available services offered by DVR. This includes, but is not limited to autism, deaf, hard of hearing, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, deaf-blind and others.

**iv. Those with disabilities who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system**

Department of Workforce Development focus groups such as the DVR Strategic Reform Task Force, WRC members, the State Independent Living Council and the DVR/Division of Workforce Solutions Joint Interest Projects identified the following needs:

- Some employers have negative attitudes about people with disabilities and WIA agencies need to realize this is a tremendous barrier to employment.
- Employers and some Job Centers have minimal knowledge of assistive technology that would allow persons with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes.
- WIA agencies need to improve their knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities under the law.
- Employers and WIA agencies need training in interviewing persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities need interview training as well.
- Location and introduction to Pathways to Independence sites need to be publicized.
- Improve working relationships with WIA for cross training as to services, how referrals are made.
- Benefits counseling should be able to consumers working with WIA towards employment goals.
- WIA agencies and employers need to increase their knowledge concerning reasonable accommodations.
- Work jointly regarding some consumers, identification of persons who may be eligible for VR services and have experiences job related problems.
- Connecting the common thread of services through different agencies.
- Insuring that persons who are providing disability related services are trained and competent in the area.
- Insuring that Job Centers are accessible both physically and attitudinally.
- A central point of contact needs to be established between DVR and other state or WIA agencies working with consumers who are also DVR consumers.
- WIA agencies need DVR assistance to study and address accessibility of assessment and testing in Job Centers. Materials in Job Center resource rooms need to be reviewed for accessibility as well.
- Training in working with Deaf-Blind consumers needs to be developed by DVR and presented to WIA agencies.
- DVR needs to increase involvement in inter-agency efforts between DVR and the Department of Corrections to work with prisoners who have disabilities.
- Statewide training on disability issues provided by DVR to W-2 agencies. This would cover new methods for managing mutual cases.
- DVR should increase involvement in marketing accessible workstations.

**b. Establishes, develops, and/or improves community rehabilitation programs (CRPs).**

**WRC, DVR, the DVR Strategic Reform Task Force and CRP's identified the following concerns:**

- DVR needs to help community partners become part of the reengineering process regarding streamlining of services, timeliness of services.
- The use of consumer input regarding satisfaction with community vendors will be done by DVR, this data needs to be shared with providers.
- Work more closely together to establish priorities through the Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council.
- DVR needs to be more flexible with placement rates when a consumer's needs require more time than anticipated by vendors, or DVR.
- Some disability groups require specialized job placement services, which is unavailable in most parts of the state.
- DVR needs to work with CRP's to develop ways to collaborate to allow consumers to engage in upward mobility activities once they become employed.
- DVR and CRP's need to identify circumstances under which a consumer remains involved in the rehabilitation process beyond the standard 90-day employment timeline.
- CRP's should be more involved in post-employment services.
- DVR needs to communicate clearly with CRP's regarding the scope of the DVR program and the extent of services that can be funded or purchased from CRP's.
- Communication with CRP's must be consistent on a statewide basis.
- Collaboration, communication and cooperation vary greatly among DVR, DWS, and other partners by Job Center location.
- Some DVR staff lack knowledge of the Rehabilitation Act. This is the driving force behind DVR. If staff are unable to communicate stipulations of the Act, partners are less likely to cooperate and cooperation will be inconsistent statewide.
- DWD and Community Rehabilitation Programs must understand the Rehab Act.

**Other Needs Assessment Activities**

DVR also gathers valuable needs assessment information in a variety of other ways, including working with SILC on the preparation of the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), conducting public hearings, obtaining direct consumer feedback on the quality and scope of services, and through consumer feedback surveys conducted by job centers across the state.